

# Psalm 80

## Prayer for Israel's Restoration

*To the leader: on Lilies, a Covenant. Of Asaph. A Psalm.*

- <sup>1</sup>Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel,  
you who lead Joseph like a flock!  
You who are enthroned upon the cherubim, shine forth  
<sup>2</sup> before Ephraim and Benjamin and Manasseh.  
Stir up your might,  
and come to save us!  
<sup>3</sup>Restore us, O God;  
let your face shine, that we may be saved.  
<sup>4</sup>O LORD God of hosts,  
how long will you be angry with your people's prayers?  
<sup>5</sup>You have fed them with the bread of tears,  
and given them tears to drink in full measure.  
<sup>6</sup>You make us the scorn<sup>[a]</sup> of our neighbors;  
our enemies laugh among themselves.  
<sup>7</sup>Restore us, O God of hosts;  
let your face shine, that we may be saved.  
<sup>8</sup>You brought a vine out of Egypt;  
you drove out the nations and planted it.  
<sup>9</sup>You cleared the ground for it;  
it took deep root and filled the land.  
<sup>10</sup>The mountains were covered with its shade,  
the mighty cedars with its branches;  
<sup>11</sup>it sent out its branches to the sea,  
and its shoots to the River.  
<sup>12</sup>Why then have you broken down its walls,  
so that all who pass along the way pluck its fruit?  
<sup>13</sup>The boar from the forest ravages it,  
and all that move in the field feed on it.

<sup>14</sup> Turn again, O God of hosts;  
look down from heaven, and see;  
have regard for this vine,  
<sup>15</sup> the stock that your right hand planted.<sup>[b]</sup>  
<sup>16</sup> They have burned it with fire, they have cut it down;<sup>[c]</sup>  
may they perish at the rebuke of your countenance.  
<sup>17</sup> But let your hand be upon the one at your right hand,  
the one whom you made strong for yourself.  
<sup>18</sup> Then we will never turn back from you;  
give us life, and we will call on your name.  
<sup>19</sup> Restore us, O LORD God of hosts;  
let your face shine, that we may be saved.

Matthew 1:1-17 (Prob incorrect in the bulletin)

## The Genealogy of Jesus the Messiah

**1** An account of the genealogy<sup>[a]</sup> of Jesus the Messiah,<sup>[b]</sup> the son of David, the son of Abraham.

<sup>2</sup>Abraham was the father of Isaac, and Isaac the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers, <sup>3</sup>and Judah the father of Perez and Zerah by Tamar, and Perez the father of Hezron, and Hezron the father of Aram, <sup>4</sup>and Aram the father of Aminadab, and Aminadab the father of Nahshon, and Nahshon the father of Salmon, <sup>5</sup>and Salmon the father of Boaz by Rahab, and Boaz the father of Obed by Ruth, and Obed the father of Jesse, <sup>6</sup>and Jesse the father of King David.

And David was the father of Solomon by the wife of Uriah, <sup>7</sup>and Solomon the father of Rehoboam, and Rehoboam the father of Abijah, and Abijah the father of Asaph,<sup>[c]</sup> <sup>8</sup>and Asaph<sup>[d]</sup> the father of Jehoshaphat, and Jehoshaphat the father of Joram, and Joram the father of Uzziah, <sup>9</sup>and Uzziah the father of Jotham, and Jotham the father of Ahaz, and Ahaz the father of Hezekiah, <sup>10</sup>and Hezekiah the father of Manasseh, and Manasseh the father of Amos,<sup>[e]</sup> and Amos<sup>[f]</sup> the father of Josiah, <sup>11</sup>and Josiah the father of Jechoniah and his brothers, at the time of the deportation to Babylon.

<sup>12</sup>And after the deportation to Babylon: Jechoniah was the father of Salathiel, and Salathiel the father of Zerubbabel, <sup>13</sup>and Zerubbabel the father of Abiud, and Abiud the father of Eliakim, and Eliakim the father of Azor, <sup>14</sup>and Azor the father of Zadok, and Zadok the father of Achim, and Achim the father of Eliud, <sup>15</sup>and Eliud the father of Eleazar, and Eleazar the father of Matthan, and Matthan the father of Jacob, <sup>16</sup>and Jacob the father of Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born, who is called the Messiah.<sup>[g]</sup>

<sup>17</sup>So all the generations from Abraham to David are fourteen generations; and from David to the deportation to Babylon, fourteen generations; and from the deportation to Babylon to the Messiah,<sup>[h]</sup> fourteen generations.

**December 22, 2019**

**Matthew 1:1-17; Psalm 80**

**Jesus 23 and Me**

**Kerra Becker English**

Before I begin the dive into Matthew's ancestry of Jesus, I first want to take a brief look at how the other three gospels begin their narratives. None of them begin in characteristic melodramatic style with "It was a dark and stormy night," which Charles Schultz has Snoopy typing away whenever he begins a new novel in the Peanuts comic strip. Still, each gospel writer has their own way of launching into the story that most certainly changed each of their own lives, and the lives of countless others.

Mark's gospel, being the oldest written and the one characterized by great urgency in both message and style of writing simply says, "The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God." But his beginning doesn't start with a very Christmas-y beginning. His "chapter one" opens with Jesus' baptism as an adult. The launch of Jesus' public ministry is beginning enough for him as an author. We won't even get to where Mark starts for three more weeks. At the beginning of the church calendar with Advent – we linger over tales of the coming Messiah and the special circumstances of his birth for four weeks, and then have the Christmas season another two weeks more before we re-connect with Jesus' baptism and public ministry. Mark's beginning seems to arrive late, at least according to the church calendar.

Luke's gospel, however, is the quintessential story of Christmas for most of us. Snoopy may not be writing it from the typewriter atop his doghouse, but in a very Peanuts Christmas movie kind of way, Linus' true telling of the meaning of Christmas is verbatim the story from

Luke's gospel. "There were shepherds in the fields, keeping watch over their flocks by night..."

It almost wouldn't be Christmas at all without Luke's rendition of the story. But even for Luke, this familiar beginning doesn't come in until chapter two. Luke is methodological. The first sentences of his gospel, text that we usually gloss over quickly, if we include at all, say, "Since many have undertaken to set down an orderly account of the events that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed on to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word, I too decided after investigating everything carefully from the very first, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know the truth concerning the things about which you have been instructed." Both this writing and the book of Acts could have simply started, "Dear Theophilus," but Luke goes into greater detail in his two volume set – Luke being the narrative of Jesus from beginning to end, and then Acts as story of the early church from Jesus' ascension into heaven through Paul's last two years in Rome where external historical records presume he may have been martyred. Theophilus itself may not even be a name but an address to his later readers given that it means "God-lover." To those who love God, Luke says, "THIS is your story." That's what I hear Luke telling us, and he wants to make sure we get the pre-birth of the Messiah details as well, about Mary's dream and about her powerful vision of a world turned right-side up by this child's birth. Luke also gives us a historical framework in wanting to situate this story in the time of King Herod, Emperor Augustus, and governor Quirinius. And he wants us to know that Jesus, the Messiah, will be greater than any of those powers – and his loyalty will belong to God alone.

Then there's John. John is not content to begin at any human kind of beginning; rather, he takes us into big bang territory. John situates the Word, his metaphor for Christ, as present during and integral to who God is from the very origin of time itself. No stables, shepherds or

wise men to be considered in his gospel. It's about the light breaking into the darkness, the Word becoming flesh and living among us. Enough said, and then he moves on with his own framework where Jesus gives long and cryptic theological answers to those who would follow him.

Any one of those beginnings merits sermon consideration in their own right, and we often hear from those texts in December and early January. But the most neglected beginning of all may be Matthew's, and I happen to think it deserves our attention too. We neglect it because of all those names there are to pronounce in a 17-verse reading. Who are all those people? Why do they matter? What is Matthew trying to tell us about Jesus' family history?

Matthew begins with Jesus' ancestry. Today we see a renewed interest in knowing one's family history, whether that's by exploring old records or getting your DNA screened for what your genetic markers indicate in terms of inheritable traits, or likely countries of origin for those who preceded you. Companies like *Ancestry.com* and *23 and Me* are selling lots of kits to help individuals notice the trends in their family trees. What people choose to do with this information may be as varied as those seeking it. It may be about determining the likelihood of having depression or a certain form of cancer, or it could be about seeing how your relatives ended up migrating toward the hills of West Virginia. A while back, there was a viral video that put together individuals from groups that had shared animosities for one another, and showed them how an Israeli and a Palestinian were likely cousins with a shared ancestor a few generations back, and how racial differences might be what we notice on the surface, but not as clear cut as we have made them out to be. Given that we are a product of our family history, its stories, and literally the pairs of chromosomes that make the particularities of life possible, I find it amazing that Matthew pulls on this knowledge to connect Jesus to the longer history of Israel, and he

links that lineage to Joseph – the person we tend to think of as Jesus’ adopted father. In three rounds of 14 generations each, Matthew will connect Jesus to the religious family history from Genesis, the rise of King David and the promises made for his rule, and the disturbing time of feeling separated during the time of Exile.

Now we are not privy to Jesus’ DNA and where it came from – but we can see how Matthew situates him in THE family story, the story of the Israelite people from what the Hebrews think about as their ancestry beginning with Abraham and Sarah. Abraham is the divine ancestor - the one promised the blessing of a multitude of descendants – outnumbering even the stars in heaven. And in this text, Jesus, the MESSIAH is identified as a “Son of Abraham.” Then the name-filled genealogical narrative starts with “Abraham was the father of Issac who was the father of Jacob”. This was quite an early name for the Hebrew God – the God of Abraham, Issac, and Jacob. Before Moses and the burning bush – there was a holy connection between this God and this family. Jesus, as a Son of Abraham, gets put firmly in that tradition.

But that’s not all, after we connect the dots from Jesus to Abraham, it’s also important to make sure he’s grafted onto the Davidic family tree. The Messiah was prophesied to come as a shoot from the stump of Jesse. The last line of the Abrahamic genealogy is “and JESSE the father of King David.” The Davidic family line and its 14 generations has an interesting history as well. David bore his son Solomon, as it says right here in Jesus’ family tree – in relationship with the WIFE of Uriah. There’s no hiding that indiscretion because everyone already knew it was there. David’s family line begins with infidelity and with sending Uriah to the front lines so that there’s a really good chance he will be killed, which he is. It’s not a pleasant history, and you can’t read that line without remembering that story. The passage of the throne that follows from son to son in that paragraph of family history tells a tale of some Kings that followed God’s

law, and a notable few who strayed from their task as leaders – most notably – the passage from Josiah to his sons was absolutely awful and a terrible mess that led to other powers ready and eager to take over the Israelite people.

The last section of names is the one that's the least familiar to me. You can read about Abraham to Jesse and David to Jechoniah through the Torah and the books of Kings and Chronicles. With the deportation to Babylon, we get the rise of the prophets, but less about the people who perpetuate these family lines through the next 14 generations. What I do find fascinating though is that Joseph's father is named Jacob – same as in the Genesis genealogy where Jacob is rescued by his son Joseph and his dreams after his brothers sell him into slavery in Egypt.

All this is told to solidify the point that Matthew makes in the beginning. This is the story about Jesus, the Messiah, Son of David, Son of Abraham. To be part of God's story, Jesus has to be a part of THIS story – or else why would you tell it? For generations – 42 of them according to Matthew's telling, (14 x3) God has been the god of THESE people. Sure enough, those, from the center of these families to the edges, have been a part of the tradition of listening to God's role in their lives. The stories they tell are particular, specific, and real. Joseph's connection to Jesus connects Jesus to a much larger, much longer story. If for no other reason, these few verses should be what reminds us that as Christians, we better darn well pay attention to the Hebrew Bible texts. I'm not sure you have a Messiah apart from these stories. Where's the need for saving if you don't already have a story of the God of salvation intervening with your people at multiple steps along the way? God chooses us. God gives us freedom. God grieves or gets angry at the messes we make. God saves us and chooses us all over again. That's the story Jesus belongs to. This is his family line. This is the promise for which he was chosen. Matthew

reminds us that you don't have Christianity without first having the story of the Israelites and the intimate relationship they have with their God. The few later groups that try to have Christianity without the longer story – tend to get it wrong – and I believe we have Matthew to thank for the emphasis on the continuity, rather than the split between traditions.

But I also love that Matthew gives us hints that the salvation we long for is not so easy to come by. That's where the stories of the women come in, stories he INCLUDES without apology. Matthew specifically mentions Tamar, Rahab and Ruth in the early history, and Bathsheba, albeit as the "wife of Uriah," in the Davidic narrative. Tamar played the prostitute to be able to continue her family line with her father-in-law Judah after her husband and his brother were struck dead by God. Rahab is the name of the prostitute who was also a spy – perhaps the same person who was Boaz's mother, or simply that this was a name meaning *prostitute*. Then there's Ruth, a foreigner and refugee who ended up being part of the longer history. These women are the wild cards, the names Matthew could have just as easily left out so that we might forget about them. But he expects us to remember their stories too – that they were crafty, perhaps thought of as different or culturally inappropriate – but still were every bit a part of the story. You don't have an Israelite kingdom perpetuated without Bathsheba's story in the mix. This is Jesus' history too – a multi-generational narrative of the men who lived by faith, and the women who lived by wisdom.

So, what does this beginning tell us about Jesus? I may just be beginning to scratch the surface of this text. You could pursue the life history of each person named and wonder how he or she contributed to the boy who would be raised to be the Messiah, the Son of the living God, made known to us thorough all these family connections. When I'm honest with myself, I find that I am the product of my parents, grandparents, and beyond. They formed me and shaped me.

They gave me my DNA – but they also gave me a rich history and heritage from who they are and who they imagine I might become. There are the stories I treasure about my Grandmother Emma Cade who, at a time when it wasn't the norm, made sure all four of her daughters got a college education, and there are stories that teach me what I want to change, like finding a great-grandfather's picture in his Klan hood and robes. I also pray that my connection to my descendants is just as rich as the stories I know about my ancestors. THIS is where we can find ourselves digging back in and through the Bible for glimpses of how this longer story tells us even more about Jesus' story. He did not come to who he was without knowing, without learning and studying and connecting to all that had come before him. His name means salvation because God has always been about saving the people God loves. AND – into the future – the story is bound to keep repeating itself. We don't get a new story, but we do get to tell the old, old story with our own generation's take on it. So today, thank an ancestor for what she or he contributed to your story, and be grateful for what you may be passing on to the generations of your family who come after you. Amen.

## **Advent Candle-lighting**

Enjoyment of seeing what others have brought to the Advent wreath: Vicki and Stephanie on Hope, Barclay and Rob on Peace, Beth on Joy, and for Christmas Eve, I'll be reading Susan Vitale's poem about light and darkness. Last week, Terry Alexander wrote a story to go with the Choral music. LOVE being part of a congregation that incorporates their own stories into God's story.

This year's Ash Grove retreat – With Leslie Shiel, poet, asked us to consider something about our 4<sup>th</sup> grade year...

Learned that if we say “You are loved” now, today, it also means that every “you” there's ever been has been loved.

Instead of saying – Love your neighbor as you love yourself, what if we said Love yourself as you love your neighbor. That might change things for some of us.

1 Corinthians 13: 4-8a (Common English Bible)

<sup>4</sup> Love is patient, love is kind, it isn't jealous, it doesn't brag, it isn't arrogant, <sup>5</sup> it isn't rude, it doesn't seek its own advantage, it isn't irritable, it doesn't keep a record of complaints, <sup>6</sup> it isn't happy with injustice, but it is happy with the truth. <sup>7</sup> Love puts up with all things, trusts in all things, hopes for all things, endures all things.

<sup>8</sup> Love never fails.

Today we light 4 candles for the 4 Sundays of Advent: The candle of hope, peace, joy, and today – LOVE.

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Gracious and Loving God,

Our Creator, Our Sustainer, Our Redeemer,

We thank You for the gift of prayer. We are grateful that we can cast our cares upon You and know that You will take care of us. We are thankful that we can be confident in knowing that while in this world there are trials and tribulations, You have overcome the world! Thank You, O God!

We come before you with heavy hearts, a nation deeply divided over impeachment proceedings. Our nation is in trouble. Our nation is divided. Our nation is facing turmoil that we have not seen in a generation. We lift up our nation to You.

We ask, O, God, that You would give our leaders wisdom, insight and courage to lead us in ways that are just and righteous. We pray that they will not bow to political pressures, regardless of where that pressure originates, but instead that they would be courageous and mindful of the responsibilities entrusted to them. In Your mercy, God, hear our prayers.

We lift up the people of this nation, O God, and ask that You would give us discernment to know right from wrong and to act on it. We pray that You would give us courage to hear, and to see, and to listen to those who may have a different opinion than our own. *We pray for hearts to be open to the economic and social plights of our country's most vulnerable citizens as they have their very lives at stake while the nation is in turmoil.* We pray that You would infuse us with Your Spirit that we might be light in the midst of the

darkness of this hour. *Given the outcome of the impeachment vote* in the House of Representatives and the *pending* trial in the Senate, help us to find ways to be healers, unifiers and reconcilers, which is who You have called us to be. In Your mercy, O God, hear our prayers.

During this Advent Season, we wait with great expectation to celebrate the miracle of the birth of Jesus the Christ. We also pray today that the miracle would manifest itself in our nation and that we would be Your hands, feet and mouthpieces in the world as we take part in the unfolding of the miraculous. In Your great mercy, O God, hear our prayers.

It is in Your precious and holy Name that we pray and ask these things, trusting and believing that they can be so and shall come to pass.

[Lord's Prayer]

Amen.